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Strangely familiar: The surprise ending in Poe, Maupassant, and Borges

Pacinthe Adel Abou Senna

The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Strangely Familiar: The Surprise Ending in Poe, Maupassant and Borges

A Thesis Submitted to

English and Comparative Literature Department

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

Pacinthe Adel Abou Senna

Under the supervision of Dr. Stephen A. Nimis

Fall 2016

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Has been approved by

Dr. (Stephen A. Nimis)
Thesis Committee Advisor_____
Affiliation_____

Dr. (William Melaney)
Thesis Committee Reader_____
Affiliation_____

Dr. (Tahia Abdel Nasser)
Thesis Committee Reader_____
Affiliation_____

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Dept. Chair	Date	Dean of HUSS	Date

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Abstract

This thesis mainly explores the surprise ending and how it creates different reactions from the audience. The particular stories I chose for Poe, Maupassant and Borges can all be categorized under the fantastic genre. These tales offer different perspectives of the unconscious, particularly the uncanny, through their main characters. In Poe's short stories, "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson," the protagonists are haunted and tormented by their doubles, forcing them to behave frantically. The Maupassant short stories, La Nuit" (Night) and "Sur l' Eau" (On the River), mainly revolve around the theme of loneliness, where the narrators attempt to escape their terrifying situations on their own. As for the Borgesian tales, "La Casa de Asterión" (The House of Asterion) and "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" (Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth), they mainly highlight the theme of the labyrinth.

While reading, I empathize with the protagonists' horrifying accounts, experiencing contradictory feelings of pleasure and fear. However, knowing that I am safely on the other side of the book, I immerse myself into these stories' insight of a relatively unknown and obscure territory: the unconscious. In most of these tales, specifically at the climax, the events take a sudden shift towards the solution of the mystery, resulting in a modern "*peripeteia*," the surprise ending. Some would consider this resolution as reducing the mystery into disappointing, mundane logic. On the other hand, this ending might bring relief, allowing the readers to be cathartically satisfied. In this comparative study, I investigate these narratives of the uncanny and the sublime experience they offer to the reader through some of the ideas of Aristotle, Tzvetan Todorov, Immanuel Kant, and Sigmund Freud. I also examine how these tales' effects are challenged by the surprise ending that denies the audience from finding truth and entraps them in a repetition compulsion.

Strangely Familiar: The Surprise Ending in Poe, Maupassant, and Borges

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Introduction

The question of how reading disturbing, painful or terrifying literature can give pleasure has intrigued mankind since late antiquity. In his *Poetics,* Aristotle explores the specific pleasure associated with tragedy. He investigates how the spectators get deeply affected by the events in the play, resulting in *catharsis*: a kind of relief and purification from negative emotions (*Poetics* 6). According to Aristotle, the audience empathizes with the painful situations the characters endure in a tragedy, experiencing the feelings of pity and fear. The spectators strongly feel these emotions, specifically at the climax, where an incident reverses the course of the plot, a moment called "*peripeteia"* (plot reversal: *Poetics* 6 *et passim*). As a result, a kind of realization or epiphany of a painful truth, called "*anagnorsis"* (recognition), hidden throughout the plot, unveils itself to the characters (*Poetics* 6 *et passim*). It usually leads the characters to doom or death. As for the audience, after putting themselves in the characters' shoes, they experience the cleansing effect of catharsis by witnessing the sudden reversal of the plot and absorbing the harsh realization at the end.

Centuries later, Longinus' essay "On Sublimity" offers a different perspective on the effects of literature. In trying to define the "sublime" effect, he mentions how it produces a certain kind of extravagance and grandeur, encompassing the reader with an unorthodox type of pleasure rather than persuasion. For Longinus, the audience should be enthralled by the powerful language and grand style of the orator, to the point of suspension of reason. Even so, this effect's chief hazard is to "go too far" ("On the Sublime" 32) so that it is paradoxically an excess that must not be too excessive. After giving many examples of metaphors and other techniques that can produce this effect, Longinus stops short of spelling out how to create the sublime, believing it is more of an instinctive talent and thus can only be partly explained.

Some of the issues raised by the essays of Aristotle and Longinus are taken up by Kant in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. It is not necessary to review his complicated divisions and specifications in detail, but only to note that for Kant the sublime occurs in contexts where one confronts something "boundless" either in magnitude or in form. Since such an object (e.g., a storm, a mighty river) cannot be grasped by the imagination, it can thus arouse fear. But insofar as that fear can be grasped by one's reason, it can be contained and as such a source of pleasure: "the feeling of the sublime is a feeling of displeasure that arises from the imagination's inadequacy … but at the same time is also a pleasure, aroused by the fact that this very judgment … is in harmony with rational ideas" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 2.27). So, this experience produces mixed feelings of awe and fear, which can be a source of the sublime feeling. The arousal and dissipation of fear here relates to Aristotle's idea of catharsis. Indeed, in another passage, Kant notes that the sight of terrifying powers of nature is "all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 2.28), stressing how aesthetic distance is key in appreciating the sublime effect.

In his essay "The Uncanny," Sigmund Freud takes another approach to account for people's interest in exploring the abnormal and the bizarre. Like Kant, he believes that aesthetics is not only about "the beautiful, the grandiose, and the attractive" but it also involves "repulsion and distress," negative feelings that patients usually suffer from (Freud 219). He defines the uncanny as the feeling one gets when he or she witnesses a certain experience that evokes a familiar idea that has been repressed and hidden in one's unconscious (Freud 241). At the beginning, when this idea comes to light, it might seem very strange and unfamiliar, like a *déja vu*, because it has been repressed for a long time so that one feels detached from it. Nevertheless,

when one realizes that this idea is familiar, feelings of uneasiness and discomfort emerge followed by horror that this idea has surfaced and is no longer buried (Freud 241-249).

Each of these thinkers confronts an apparent oxymoron: tragic pleasure, encountering the boundless, becoming aware of the unconscious; and in each case these contradictory feelings can be associated with an aspect of literary experience. Even though most of these thinkers do not relate their theories to the literary realm, their ideas can offer new light in perceiving certain genres of literature, such as mystery fiction, particularly the fantastic genre. Tzvetan Todorov defines it as occupying the thin line between reality and illusion. It is either the result of inexplicable happenings from the past – the uncanny – or caused by mysterious phenomena yet to be explained in the future, i.e. the marvelous (Todorov 42). In both cases, the fantastic is only concerned with present events, happening only through the narrator's perception (Todorov 31). This particular genre portrays fascinating stories that breach the limits of the imagination and pressure one's reason to come up with satisfactory interpretations. They present to the reader some sort of enigma, inviting him or her to delve, with the narrator/protagonist, into the depth of a confusing and unfamiliar tale in order to find a hidden truth.

The vagueness and incomprehensibility of the plot generate magnitude and awe for the reader because it surpasses logic and normal expectations. This kind of story does not necessarily induce fear, but more often generates in the reader, as a result of uncertainty, feelings of discomfort and uneasiness (Todorov 35). As a consequence, one starts to doubt the reliability of the narrator, whether the latter is dreaming or is insane (Todorov 39). However, as the truth slowly arises in the story, the reader empathizes with the character's terrifying situations. Then, the character's repressions start to appear in disguised forms, leading to the uncanny effect. So can this uncanny feeling bring aesthetic pleasure?

This thesis will attempt to answer the above question and its related ideas through examining the uncanny evidenced in some of the short stories of three pioneers in the fantastic genre: Edgar Allan Poe, Guy de Maupassant, and Jorge Luis Borges. I will further investigate these narratives of the uncanny and their sublime effect on the reader by focusing on their surprise endings. For Poe, I will study "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson" while for Maupassant, I will read "La Nuit" (The Night) and "Sur l' Eau" (On the River). "La Casa de Asterión" (The House of Asterion) and "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" (Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth) are the stories I chose for Borges.

These particular tales discuss different perspectives of the unconscious, particularly the uncanny, through their main characters. While reading, I empathize with the protagonists' horrifying accounts, experiencing contradictory feelings of pleasure and fear. However, knowing that I am safely on the other side of the book, I immerse myself into these stories' insight of a relatively unknown and obscure territory: the unconscious. In most of these tales, specifically at the climax, the events take a sudden shift towards the solution of the mystery, resulting in a modern version of Aristotle's "*peripeteia*," the surprise ending. This unexpected turn of events shocks the reader with an "*anagnorsis."* I am very intrigued by this sudden revelation and how it creates multiple and different reactions from the audience. Some would consider this resolution as reducing the mystery into disappointing, mundane logic. As a result, the unfamiliar dissipates into the familiar, the frightful becomes domesticated and the thrilling magic of the uncanny is abated into safety and security. On the other hand, the resolution might bring relief to the readers, allowing them to be cathartically satisfied.

Poe and the Haunting Unconscious in "the Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson"

In this chapter, I will read two of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous short stories. He is considered one of the first Americans to master writing mystery fiction (Alifano 44-45). According to Todorov, his tales, especially these two, can be categorized under the genre of "fantastic-uncanny." Todorov uses "uncanny" here to describe the kind of stories that portray incomprehensible events that will be explained at the end in relation to the character's past (Todorov 44-48). The ending of "William Wilson" does have some kind of explanation, but it is not the same case with "The Tell-Tale Heart."

In these two tales, we have the theme of "the Double". In "The Uncanny," Freud defines the "Dopplegänger" (stemming from the Freudian divided-self) as one's premature belief that there is another person that is physically identical to him or her. Yet, this double is actually what is known as "the conscience," the voice of "authority" inside every person, constantly reminding one not to stray from religious or societal values. It is only delusional people who fail to recognize this voice as their own and start to perceive it as a reflection of another human being who is threatening their lives (Freud 235-236). Poe invites the reader to pleasurably experience the narrator's horrifying suffering from his projected double. Both short stories end with major surprises, deflecting the reader from the paranormal reality of the protagonists.

Alone in Maupassant's Darkness

The following chapter tackles two short stories of French author Guy de Maupassant, known best as a realist in his writing. However, these tales present fantastical situations to highlight the obscure nature of the unconscious. Thus, these horrible happenings distance the protagonists from their surrounding societies and doom them in never-ending loneliness. Maupassant uses language and twists in plot to emphasize the feelings of loss in the narrator and

to provoke contradictory reactions in the reader. Furthermore, the character and the reader keep wondering whether the events are real or imaginary. As a result, these stories engulf the reader in a thrilling, aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, as in Poe's stories, the reader faces surprise endings that pose questions about the pleasurable experience of reading.

The Labyrinth: the Uncanny Prison in Borges

Borges's stories mainly focus on the portrayal of the unconscious as an entrapping labyrinth. Even though Poe and Maupassant's accounts of the unconscious can be described as imprisoning, Borges' tales put the characters in actual mazes that play tricks on their minds. Borges draws on ancient Greek and Arab myths to comment on the situation of modern man. In this chapter, I will explore Borges' considerably different style and language from his predecessors, Poe and Maupassant. Yet, these particular short stories also fall under the fantastic genre with their inexplicable plots and vague endings. They are also successful in shocking the reader with sudden denouements that complicate the reader's appreciation of the text.

Chapter I:

Poe and the Haunting Unconscious in "the Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson"

There has always been a problematic relationship between Poe and readers from around the world and throughout the centuries. His reception has been contentious by several critics, like Harold Bloom (Benfey 27) while many have praised and appreciated his work, calling him "Father of the modern short story" and "Master of the uncanny" (Wuletich-Brinberg 32, 99)[1]. Most of Poe's stories are categorized as highly passionate where the narrator recounts his or her feelings through some horrible happenings. That is why he was considered "the first important American writer" to perceive violence and crime from the point of view of the criminal and brilliant at narrowing the gap between sanity and madness (Kennedy 4, 7). Walter Scott criticized E.T.A. Hoffman and similar authors like Poe in his essay "On the Supernatural in Fiction" by saying: "[he] stimulates and indulges their [readers] imagination with utter disregard of the need for discipline and restraint … threatened to unnerve and destabilize the reader" (Wuletich-Brinberg 110). However, readers can never appreciate a "disciplined and restrained" imagination, if there is such a thing. The real pleasure stems from reading about other fantastical worlds that would allow us to escape from mundane reality. It is the type of imagination Baudelaire describes when he says: "[it] is almost divine faculty which perceives immediately

[1] Sybil Wuletich-Brinberg tackles in her book *Poe: The Rationale of the Uncanny* the concept of the uncanny and its relation to Poe. The author explains this relation thoroughly by discussing several of Poe's major works in separate chapters. At the beginning of the book, she relates the romantic with the uncanny while in the next section she discusses how romance can be grotesque. There are also articles tackling "William Wilson", "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Double" of Freud. Her ideas have helped in forming many of my interpretations. I recommend this book for a deeper understanding of how Poe created his psychologically challenged characters and of how he became a pioneer in writing the mystery fiction genre.

and without philosophical methods the inner and secret relations of things" (Baudelaire 52-53), as in most of Poe's tales.

There have been hundreds of books and articles written on Poe, especially on his life and how it affected his writing. However, I am more interested in exploring his short stories' effect on the reader and why many enjoy reading him so much. In his 1840 preface to his short story collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, Poe mentions that most of his stories deal with the "terror of the soul" (Poe "Preface" 7-8) and these two short stories, "the Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson," are great examples of the manifestation of this terror. They have no fixed time nor locus, most probably to highlight their universality or to indicate that the setting is not important to the events of the story. Poe classified them as "Arabesques" because there are "very few characters- a narrator, two or three others [set in unspecified time and in imaginary places]" and because they tackle "extreme psychological states." The narrator is in most stories insane (Hoffman 209- 10), yet he or she is the only one recounting the details of the tale, thus becoming unreliable. In this sense, Poe wishes to shed light on the criminal's psyche more than the crime itself (Benfey 29).

At the beginning of these two tales, the protagonist, in each story, experiences bizarre and inexplicable circumstances. As these events unfold, the narrator undergoes uncanny feelings, creating confusion and fear in both him and the reader. Because the truth of his guilt is so unbearable, the narrator represses it, therefore replacing unconsciously the guilt emotion with horror and fear. Then, he lives in the illusion of being terrorized and horrified because of something external happening to him, unaware that he is the cause of his own fear. As Sybil Wuletich-Brinberg puts it: "These characters thus become fascinating not as passive and innocent victims of forces beyond their capacity to control, but as partly-conscious participants

in their own continuing acts of self- delusion, and thus of emotional, moral and intellectual suicide" (103). After the uncanny becomes familiar again, the truth is revealed, confirming the character's knowledge about himself yet at the same time leading to his destruction.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" is considered one of Poe's best stories in closely depicting a state of mental illness. The reader finds how the narrator is desperate to be heard, as if this is the only way he can prove his sanity. He is so proud of his abilities and his technique in killing the old man; that is why he wants to recount every single detail. Poe successfully conveys the narrator's madness to the reader through his special use of punctuation and emphasis in speech. The story is full of examples of this, especially in italicizing and repeating certain words (Silverman 14). The narrator describes the beating of the old man's heart: "It was *a low, dull, quick sound - much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 357; italics in original). In italicizing this sentence, the narrator possibly expresses to the reader a shift in his voice, as if he is whispering the description of this muffled heartbeat so that no one would hear its throb.

Moreover, Poe uses punctuation to signify different thoughts going through the narrator's mind (Benfey 31). To the protagonist's horror, the noise started to increase in volume: "I felt that I must scream or die! and now - again! - hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder*!" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 357). By putting a dash after "now" and before "hark," Poe commands the reader to stop and listen with the narrator to the escalating heartbeat. The narrator repeats the word "louder" several times throughout this paragraph, emphasizing the noise's augmentation. The last "louder" in the sentence is italicized possibly to signify intensity in the narrator's voice. Furthermore, Poe uses more dashes in this example: "Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! –no, no! They heard! –they suspected! – they *knew!* …" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 357).

In this sentence, the narrator answers his question after the dashes, realizing that the officers must have heard the heartbeat and figured out what he did. At this point, the reader deduces that the narrator might be imagining this sound as the "men chatted pleasantly, and smiled," without reacting to his violent outbursts (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 357).

"William Wilson" was written in 1839, before Dostoyevsky's novella "The Double." That is why it is safe to say that Poe was one of the first to write about the idea of the Dopplegänger, defined by Freud eighty years later as part of the uncanny. Throughout this story, the double of the narrator has been tormenting him all his life, following him around wherever he goes. Nevertheless, unlike the usual evil depictions of the double character, such as in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in this tale the double of the narrator is actually the one urging him to behave well and refrain from committing any "folly" (Poe "William Wilson" 219). William Wilson, the narrator, has been described as living by his own rules, as his name highlights "Will-son, son of his own will" (Hoffman 213).

At the beginning, William describes how his parents didn't have any ruling power over him. He illustrates this by saying: "…my parents … I was left to the guidance of my own will, and became, in all but name, the master of my own actions." Furthermore, he describes the school principle who is also the pastor of the church as a "gigantic paradox" (Poe "William Wilson" 213-214). In his mockery of this higher power, he proves his refusal of having to surrender to someone else other than himself. Therefore, when he realizes the other William Wilson's presence in the school and the various similarities between them, he starts to feel threatened and trapped, since this equality means for him a kind of superiority. His feelings towards the other Wilson are heightened when the latter starts to give him guidance described as

"interference [that] often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated" (Poe "William Wilson" 218).

Poe also uses various sets of punctuation and italicization in William's confessional monologue. In his description of Wilson's voice, William mentions that: "My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, it was identical; *and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own*" (Poe "William Wilson" 217; italics in original). In this case, Poe italicizes the whisper's description to emphasize the extreme similarity between the two Williams. In addition, Poe illustrates Wilson's imprisonment of William by beginning and ending a paragraph with an italicized "*I fled in vain.*" William explains how Wilson followed him everywhere: "Villain! -- at Rome, with how untimely, yet with how spectral an officiousness, stepped he in between me and my ambition! At Vienna, too -- at Berlin -- and at Moscow!" (Poe "William Wilson" 223; italics in original). The dashes here can indicate intervals in space and time among the different cities, confirming Wilson's haunting of William in every step.

In an article titled "Frantic Forensic Oratory: Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart'," Brett Zimmerman imagines the storyteller on trial arguing in self-defense (34). The narrator must try to win the sympathetic attention of the jury or the prosecutor (or any audience) by resorting to logos and pathos (Zimmerman 41-42). First of all, he tries to prove his sanity where he admits he has a "disease" but not "madness." He states: "Why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease has sharpened my senses … How then am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily - how calmly I can tell you the whole story" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 354). Moreover, he continues on how he observed the old man carefully every night with a lantern, wishing to see the vulture eye open. Nevertheless, although he uses "the language of reason and the Aristotelian appeal to logos to justify his actions," his motive and crime are still irrational to the reader (Zimmerman 39).

The narrator claims he knows what the old man is going through, especially when he heard the latter groan, he states: “I knew the sound well. Many a night … it was welled up from my own bosom … the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart” (Poe “The Tell-Tale Heart” 355). The storyteller continues to guess the thoughts of the old man, saying “Yes, he has been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions; but he had found all in vain” (Poe “The Tell-Tale Heart” 355). This is the point where the narrator tries to appeal to the audience’s emotions by presenting himself like a victim, for the old man’s eye was tormenting him. He mentions:

> Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture - a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees - very gradually - I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever. (Poe “The Tell-Tale Heart” 354)

Then, before the narrator is about to kill him, he directs his lantern on the eye, describing it as “dull blue with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones” (Poe “The Tell-Tale Heart” 355-56).

There are several interpretations of why the old man’s eye is so fearful. First of all, the eye is “pale blue with a film over it” (Poe “The Tell-Tale Heart” 354), meaning it reflects, like a mirror. So, it might be reflecting the narrator’s dark unconscious that has been troubling him all those nights. The second possible explanation is highlighted in the storyteller’s use of the word “vulture,” an obvious symbol of approaching death (Poe “The Tell-Tale Heart” 354). For some

reason or other, this old man is a threat to the mortality of the narrator; that is why he reminds the storyteller of this fact every time he looks at him. Another interesting interpretation is that this old man might possibly be the narrator's father (or father-figure) where any son is afraid of his father seeing him doing something wrong. Consequently, the narrator would be afraid of the old man's eye who has caught him in the act (whatever it is) (Hoffman 229). Additionally, this old man can be a symbol of the narrator's superego, who like the father-figure, is breathing down the protagonist's neck on what he should or shouldn't do.

There are also many uncanny elements present in "William Wilson." One example is when one night, William decides to look at the other Wilson while he's sleeping. As in "The Tell-Tale Heart," William enters the room slowly with a lantern to look at Wilson's face:

> I looked; -- and a numbness, an iciness of feeling instantly pervaded my frame. My breast heaved, my knees tottered, my whole spirit became possessed with an objectless yet intolerable horror. Gasping for breath, I lowered the lamp in still nearer proximity to the face. Were these -- *these* the lineaments of William Wilson? I saw, indeed, that they were his, but I shook as if with a fit of the ague in fancying they were not. What *was* there about them to confound me in this manner? I gazed; -- while my brain reeled with a multitude of incoherent thoughts. (Poe "William Wilson" 219; italics in original)

William never clearly states what he saw in the other Wilson that frightened him so much. However, the reader can deduce that only at night – where the unconscious emerges and unifies – was William able to see the facial similarity between him and his rival. After that, William wishes for the death of Wilson because the latter persecuted him in college and

everywhere he traveled. He thought that he will be able to survive if he destroyed Wilson, not knowing that he and Wilson are inseparable in life and death. Throughout the story, William recounts his tale with a regretful tone, for not listening to the good intention of the other Wilson's advice. He compares himself to Wilson's behavior by saying "that his moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom … hated and too bitterly despised" (Poe "William Wilson" 218).

Poe regards the reader as a co-creator to the story, because while reading, one receives very new information and tries to figure out the clues to get to the end (Witherington 474). Consequently, for Poe, the short story is the best medium to deliver the intended "unity of impression" on the reader. Because Poe's stories can be finished in one sitting, one can grasp their "immense force derivable from the totality" of the effect, without any distractions on his or her imagination (Poe "Reviews on American Authors" 571-72). Before exploring the effect of these two tales on the reader, it is important to mention why Poe's stories are appealing in the first place. First of all, according to Kenneth Silverman, these stories can "reawaken the magical beliefs we all had as children and have never wholly abandoned, uncanny feelings that dumb objects can come to life … that the dead can return" (24). Moreover, many like to read about near-death encounters and tales of insanity, themes that dominate many of Poe's stories. Another reason, which rebuts Scott's criticism, is what psychiatrist Herbert Hendin suggests; how people always wish to escape daily commitments and pressures through seeking out "fragmented sensory experience" (Kennedy 4).

Poe's characters are very mysterious and obscure, mostly flat without really developing throughout the story. They are not given names and even if they are, as in "William Wilson," the narrator would clearly state that these names are not real. That is why one wonders what kind of

response Poe intended from his audience in creating his characters as such. A possible answer might be that Poe thought it would be easier for the reader to put him/herself in the character's shoes and unconsciously live the character's situation. In addition, the use of first-person narration facilitates the reader's transition into the character's world. Another reason is that the name, birthplace and parentage are elements related to the body, not the soul, which is Poe's main focus in his tales (Hoffman 205-6).

In addition, in both short stories, the narrator seem to be talking to an unidentified person, someone he wants to tell his story to, which allows the reader to imagine him/herself as the protagonist's listener (Benfey 30). The narrator manages to seduce the listener to the point where he/she desperately wants to know what will happen. One then feels transported into an alien world – the unconscious of a psychologically disturbed person – that is nearly impossible to fully perceive. At this point, the reader feels a kind of overwhelming, yet uncomfortable pleasure, the sublime, in discovering this new realm, rarely found in reality. Yet, by listening to a murderer recounting his crime, the reader can be considered an equally guilty accomplice in the murder (Witherington 473). On the other hand, the reader has the privilege of being deeply immersed into the mind of the murderer and at the same time enjoying the position of the accuser, safely on the other side of the book without feeling guilty. Ironically, in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the storyteller calls the police officers and anyone else who has been witness to his account "villains" because they allowed themselves to enjoy listening to such a horrific story while still believing that they are not equally guilty (Witherington 474).

Poe wrote tales about reason, like the detective stories of August Dupin, or stories about passion, like the ones discussed here (Wuletich-Brinberg 6). So, in this light, it is very intriguing to examine how the audience reacts to the surprise endings of his stories. After the reader is

presented with inexplicable events, one tries to recognize some clues, in an attempt to reconstruct the situation the character is undergoing. Consequently, one goes through feelings of confusion and fear and is awed by the sublime journey the tale is offering. Then, when the surprise ending happens, readers react differently after the shock, depending on what affects them the most, passion or reason. Some readers, who respond more to passionate plots, may feel disappointed. To them, the unexpected ending destroys the bridge to the breathtaking sphere and puts a stop to the magical and mesmerizing thrill of living in a mystery. Other readers, who are more logical in their expectations, may sense relief after experiencing such intense emotions through the character's shoes. This relief is better termed as catharsis, where the reader is purged from these negative emotions and is contented to be back to reality.

Any reader would probably be amazed at how the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" simply confessed at the end, after taking such careful measures in committing this secret crime and properly hiding the body. He lists "the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 356). First of all, he worked "hastily, but in silence." Then, "I dismembered the corpse … no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 356). Furthermore, he explains to the three police officers that "the shriek, I said, was my own in a dream" (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 356). Later, when the officers stopped the questions and seemed satisfied, he starts to hear the throbbing of the old man's heart again, which grew louder. It is only the last line in the tale where the plot is twisted with the narrator bursting out: " 'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed! - tear up the planks! here, here! - It is the beating of his hideous heart!' " (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 357). Thinking that the officers are hearing the sound too but "were making a mockery of [his] horror," he confesses because he couldn't bear the sound any further (Poe "The Tell-Tale Heart" 357).

The ending of "The Tell-Tale Heart" allows the reader to deduce that the narrator's problem was never solved with the murder of the old man. Since the pulse of the heart continues, a possible interpretation is how it was the narrator's heart that has been beating all this time. This particular possibility intensifies the discrepancy inside the narrator in recognizing his psychological problem. Another likelihood for this ending is how, according to Benfey, for a killer like this narrator, it is an unbearable, obsessive urge to confess to his actions (35-37). Nevertheless, the narrator is clearly aware that by confessing, he is doomed. It can be argued that by letting the truth out, he is allowing the uncanny to return, which will lead to his ruin. That is why he was only forced to confess, because he couldn't endure the torturing throb anymore. Some readers would be definitely disappointed with the ending because they were led to believe that the narrator will be able to get away with his crime, especially after all the hard work he put into it. Conversely, readers, who prefer logical endings, would be satisfied to find that the murderer is ruined because of his crime.

The ending of "William Wilson" is also very unexpected, especially to the reader who couldn't detect the clues that the other Wilson is William's projected superego, his double. The *peripeteia* happens when William stabs Wilson, realizing only then that he stabbed himself. For some readers, the ending ruined the supernatural element of Wilson and the possibility of him being a creature, rather than a projection. However, it is tragic how William's struggle ends in death, as if this is the only possible denouement. Yet, it may be the suitable punishment for the careless life he led. The last lines of the story encompass the conflict of the superego and the id in William and emphasize the non-existence of the ego without them. "*You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead -- dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me*

didst thou exist -- and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (Poe "William Wilson" 225; italics in original).

On the other hand, the surprise ending has a common impact on all readers; it creates a jolt that forces one to re-read the story from the beginning. This shocking technique can also be a reflection of the unconscious. Most, if not all, people do not know what is present in their unconscious until one of the repressions is suddenly acted out. It is only then that people start to notice that they might need psychiatric help. The same can be argued when reading stories such as Poe's. As readers, we need to be shocked so we can re-read the story and look for missed clues that insinuate this unpredictable ending. Yet, the question remains whether this re-reading can provide new meaning or not. Most readers would definitely pick up some hints in their second time, especially at the beginning. For example, in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the beginning confirms the protagonist's insanity through his denial and through our previous knowledge of his crime. Likewise in "William Wilson," we finally understand why the narrator is ashamed and starts his tale in a regretful tone. Nevertheless, the reader is still left with so many unanswered questions, which re-reading the story several times will not answer. Poe never makes us certain whether the events in "The Tell-Tale Heart" actually happened or whether it was the narrator's imagination. In addition, we never know what really happens to William after he stabs himself. We find ourselves stuck in infinite narrative repetition, similar to our futile attempt at fully understanding the unconscious.

Chapter II

Alone in Maupassant's Darkness

A writer of more than three hundred short stories, a couple of novels, and some poetry, Guy de Maupassant has well deserved his place in the French and English canon. His writing is very diverse, from social satire to war tales. One possible influence on Maupassant is Edgar Allan Poe, whom Maupassant read through Baudelaire's translations (Urdiales Shaw 126). Some critics also believe that a couple of Maupassant's early works, such as "Le Tic," were influenced by Poe's style of writing. Moreover, Maupassant tackled, like Poe, the theme of madness in several of his short stories, where he would employ the first-person narration to heighten the reader's response to the narrator's behavior (Urdiales Shaw 127-29). I am mainly interested in Maupassant's stories that incorporate the uncanny and the sublime and how they are written differently from Poe's short stories. Moreover, since the surprise ending is one of my focuses, I chose two of his short stories with this kind of denouement. With "La Nuit" and "Sur L'Eau," I will attempt to trace the uncanny elements present in the stories and the sublime effect on the reader. In addition, I will analyze these stories' surprise endings and the audience's possible reactions to them.

One of Maupassant's most disturbing tales, "La Nuit: Un Cauchemar" (Night: A Nightmare) tells the story of a man's walk at night. The narrator starts by describing his fascination with the night and his dislike of the morning with its excess sunlight and crowded noise. From the first line in the short story, the reader wonders why the narrator loves the night so passionately. The following paragraphs contrast the effect of day on the narrator with the one of the night, where he feels more energetic and "animated" than in the morning (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 795). His description of the night and its effect on the city is filled with

negative adjectives like “somber,” “sinister cry,” and “efface and destroy;” nevertheless, he lists them with pleasure and awe (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 795). It is only when the narrator says: “One is finally killed by what one violently loves” that the reader senses a shift in tone, where the narrator is about to recite something horrible that has happened to him (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 795).

“Sur L’Eau” (On the River) begins with a narrator recounting his friendship with a man who greatly enjoys canoeing in the Seine and who is extremely passionate about being in the water. After that, this narrator’s perspective disappears and the voice is given to this canoeing loving man. He relates his fascination with the river as a mysterious realm where “odd things that have no real existence are seen at night and strange noises are heard” (de Maupassant “On the River” 169). Then, he recounts a certain incident that made him appreciate the fearful grandiosity of the river. One peaceful night, while rowing back home, he got very tired and decided to anchor the boat and rest for a while. When he wanted to move again, the anchor was stuck at the bottom and refused to budge. The narrator doesn’t panic, believing it’s only a matter of time before fishermen would rescue him. While waiting, he enjoys the good weather with a bottle of rum (de Maupassant “On the River” 170).

It is very interesting how both short stories start off with a peaceful and calm atmosphere (Morris 476) as when the narrator of “La Nuit” describes the weather that night as “very fine, very mild, very warm” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 795). During his long walk in the streets of Paris, amidst his passionate description of his beloved night, the narrator gazes at the stars in an attempt to perceive their infinite and obscure world: “the stars above … thrown haphazard through infinity … think so much” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 796). The

situation is similar to the "Sur L'Eau" storyteller, who mentioned that "the weather was gorgeous … was soft and still," on his way back (de Maupassant "On the River" 170).

Although nothing significant happens at this point in the two short stories, both narrators experience feelings of uneasiness and malaise, for no apparent reason (Morris 476). With the storyteller of "La Nuit," after staying for a long time in Bois de Boulogne, he came out at 2 am to find the night quite deserted with the lights nearly running out. He expresses that he "was seized by a strange thrill, a powerful and unforeseen emotion, and exaltation of mind which bordered on frenzy." After realizing that "the city was sleeping," he states how "for the first time I felt that something strange was going to happen, something new" (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 796). The words "strange" and "new" most probably signify the unfamiliar that might have been once familiar, i.e. the uncanny. In parallel, the rower in "Sur L'Eau" was not really worried that he couldn't remove the anchor. Nevertheless, after sitting for some time in extreme silence, without any sound from nocturnal animals or plants, he also started to feel a strange discomfort. He attempts to calm himself: "I determined not to be afraid, but there was something in me besides my will and that something was fainthearted" (de Maupassant "On the River" 170-171).

The following complicated events pave the way for the complete manifestation of the uncanny in both stories. The wanderer of "La Nuit" finds himself in nearly total darkness because thick clouds have covered the stars, the only source of light he admired: "A curtain of clouds as dense as the ether had buried the stars" (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 796). Furthermore, the people and the gas lights fade from the streets, making the narrator lose his way back home. Moreover, although he can hear the ticking of his watch – a probable representation of his beating heart – he can't see the indicators to know the time, a possible foreshadowing of his near death. With the long absence of the morning sun, the narrator keeps wandering in an

attempt to reach the Halles, where the merchants set the market at dawn. He screams loudly for help, but no one responds, even when he rings the bells of several doors (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 797).

In a similar fashion, the plot thickens in "Sur L'Eau." To worsen the narrator's malaise and fear, a thick fog began to envelop him and his surroundings. He claims that he couldn't see his boat or his own feet, which generated wild imaginations of invisible creatures trying to climb up his boat and drag him to the bottom (de Maupassant "On the River" 170-171). Like the narrator of "La Nuit," the storyteller feels anxious and trapped. He tries to calm himself with reason but is still dominated by extreme fear of what will happen to him. To his distress, he starts to scream for anyone to hear him, but in vain (de Maupassant "On the River" 171). Strangely enough, the storyteller could only see the reeds through the fog: "… watched the highest clumps of reeds, which at times assumed strange shapes that appeared to move" (de Maupassant "On the River" 170). These particular plants must have significance, especially since they appear repeatedly throughout the story. A possible explanation for the reed symbol can be found in Celtic astrology, where it embodies kept secrets and the ability to unravel hidden meanings in one's psyche (Williams). Then, those reeds could symbolize the narrator's hidden secret that was once familiar, but has now become completely unfamiliar. It is evident in the narrator's failure to grasp this truth even though the reeds are visible to him through the fog.

With the unusual disappearance of people, the light and the absence of the morning sun, these short stories could be illustrating a catabasis, the Greek mythological journey to the underworld (Lewis and Short S.V. catabasis). There are several motifs in both tales that insinuate these narrators' death-like experience. First of all, both storytellers are completely alone, with no one listening or paying attention to their existence, highlighting their solitude in their journey to

death. In addition, the boat in “Sur L’Eau” and the cab with an invisible driver in “La Nuit” are suggestive of Charon, the ferryman that takes the dead through the river Styx – symbolized in the Seine – to the gates of Hades (Smith 689). Another implicit catabasis allusion, occurring in both stories, is the dogs, where in “La Nuit,” the last living being he encounters is a dog that “growled” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 797). Moreover, in “Sur L’Eau:” “Suddenly I began to shout … with shouting I listened. A dog was barking in the distance” (de Maupassant “On the River” 171). Those two dogs are suggestive of Cerberus, the guardian of the gates of Hades, indicating that the narrators are approaching the end of their journey (Smith 671).

Another more psychological interpretation of these bizarre events is how they can be symbolic projections of what the narrators are suffering from in their unconscious. With the disappearance of living beings around them, the narrators’ feelings of loss, despair and alienation are intensified, signifying that no one is able to empathize with their situation and no one can help. In addition, the two things that the narrators were extremely passionate about ended up turning against them and becoming the source of their calamity. The narrator of “La Nuit” expresses how “…my beloved night was weighing heavily upon my heart” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 796). The rower of “Sur L’Eau” tried to reason with himself: “…this foolish and uncountable fear was growing worse and worse and was becoming positive terror. I remained motionless, with open eyes and ears, waiting. For what? I scarcely knew, but it must have been for something terrible” (de Maupassant “On the River” 171).

A fascinating element in both short stories is the presence of intervals, where significant changes happen after each one. They might be indications of lapses of unconsciousness that happen to the narrators. For example, in “La Nuit,” the narrator spends a great amount of time in Bois de Boulogne without any clarification of his actions inside, only to come out finding the

city deserted (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 796). Later, after he got lost in the streets of Paris for an indefinite time, he was able to finally reach the Halles that was, to his surprise, empty of merchants (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 797). After that, he reaches the Seine, his final destination, where his watch completely stops. Gaps in time can also be traced in “Sur L’Eau” where the narrator, out of being too afraid, remained lying down in his boat for quite some time. Then, when he finally summoned the courage to get up, he observes: “I was greeted by the most marvelous, stupendous sight that it is possible to imagine. It was a vision of fairyland, one of those phenomena that travelers in distant countries tell us about but that we are unable to believe” (de Maupassant “On the River” 171). The fog has lifted from the river and formed hill-like shapes on the banks, allowing the moonlight to clearly illuminate the river and animating its creatures again. Witnessing the night fantastically coming back to life, the narrator no longer feels afraid and is instead transported into an unearthly, mesmerizing sphere (de Maupassant “On the River” 171-172), a sublime experience that cannot be fully perceived yet that brings pleasure to the storyteller. Afterwards, the rower fell asleep and woke up to a somber, cloudy, and cold dawn, which might foreshadow an unpleasant ending (de Maupassant “On the River” 172).

There are several intriguing factors in those two short stories when considering their effect on the reader. Even though they do not exceed four pages in length, they are crowded with figurative devices that intensify the reader’s experience. First of all, like Poe, Maupassant did not name any of these narrators to allow the reader an easy and smooth empathy with the storytellers. With “La Nuit”, it is appalling for one to imagine himself or herself standing in the middle of a desolate city in complete darkness, an experience that most certainly no one would like to undergo. However, this short story has given the chance to the audience to immerse

themselves in the narrator's mind. The absence of light, thus the absence of sight, intensely evokes, in the storyteller and the reader, horror from uncertainty and loss in this labyrinthine setting.

As for "Sur L'Eau," it is an especially fascinating story to the reader because one imagines him/herself again in the nameless narrator's shoes, embodying all his thoughts and feelings. Being alone in a boat, in the middle of the river, in barely illuminated darkness is not a situation one finds him/herself every day. Moreover, the narrator's description of the nocturnal, quiet nature at the beginning is extremely appealing since he focuses on its sublime impression. Later, the reader empathizes with both narrators in their horror and despair during their plight. More specifically, the part where both narrators cry at the top of their lungs arouses a nightmarish situation, because they are trapped in utter solitude.

In the article "Le Blanc et le Noir: The Spectre behind the Spectrum in Maupassant's Short Stories," Hannah Scott stresses whiteness and blackness in several Maupassant short stories. In her analysis of "Sur L'Eau," Scott pinpoints sections where the white and black colors are juxtaposed to possibly increase the anxiety in the reader (Scott 270). Examples of this comparison are found with the formation of the fog. The reader finds the narrator illustrating the "thick whiteness" of the mist that renders his surroundings invisible. It also hides the moonlight that the darkness was allowing, suggesting that the white color is much more sinister than the black one (Scott 272). Later, the narrator is overwhelmed with the brightness of the light shining through the lifting fog, next to the dark background (Scott 273). This scene challenges the imagination of the reader, envisioning the whiteness and blackness side by side. It is evident in:

> The mist, which two hours ago hung over the water, had lifted and settled on the banks of the stream. It formed on each side an unbroken hill, six or seven yards in

> height, that shone in the moonlight with the dazzling whiteness of snow. Nothing could be seen but the flashing river, moving between the two white mountains, and overhead a full moon that illuminated the milky-blue sky. (de Maupassant "On the River" 171)

Afterwards, when the narrator woke up at dawn, "the moon was gone and the sky was covered with clouds … the wind was blowing; it was cold and completely dark" (de Maupassant "On the River" 172). This description highlights that the whiteness of the moonlight prevailed during the night while darkness obscures the rise of the sun.

Scott's observation can also be used to read "La Nuit," where at the beginning of the story, the narrator mentions his dislike of the morning sun and the over-brightness of the streets, theatres, and cafés. The storyteller describes his disgust with "brutal light," "melancholy of this artificial and crude light," "monstrous living pearls" and "ugly gaslight" (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 795-796). On the other hand, he highlights blackness as the more pleasant color than the whiteness of the light. It is evident when he mentions "black streams full of stars" and "shadows seemed luminous" (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 795). Furthermore, he enjoys the contrast of the gas lamps with the celestial darkness. Nevertheless, when all the gas lamps get extinguished, the narrator is completely lost, emphasizing how he only loved the tamed version of the night with the lights, the people, and the coaches, inhabiting the streets. The use of blackness is now different where the narrator attributes negative adjectives to the night such as in "impenetrable obscurity" and "through streets that were lonely and dark, dark and somber as death" (de Maupassant "Night: A Nightmare" 796-97).

Another contributing factor to the tales' effect on the reader is the author's play with punctuation. Besides his use of exclamation marks to refer to the narrator's surprise or terror,

Maupassant uses in several parts the dash to possibly order the reader to pause and reflect on the last word before the dash and then slowly read what follows. There are various examples scattered in both short stories like in “La Nuit”: “Well, yesterday – was it yesterday – yes, no doubt…” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 795). After losing track of time, the narrator questions himself between the dashes, as if the reader is overhearing his thoughts out loud. Moreover, Maupassant portrays the storyteller frantically ringing the door bells: “I waited again – nothing!” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 797). With this example, Maupassant wants the reader to listen with the character and then feel the weight of the word “nothing,” after the brief pause. The last lines of the story are filled with ellipses between the words, most probably to signify indeterminate lapses of time between each action or the character is slowly and gradually dying: “Then sand…Mud…then water. I dipped my hand into it. It was flowing…flowing…cold…cold…cold …almost frozen…almost dried up…almost dead” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 798).

The same technique can be traced in “Sur L’Eau,” when the narrator mentions: “…irresistible, devouring passion – a love for the river (de Maupassant “On the River” 169). Here, the dash is used to convey a stronger feeling for the river than passion; it is love. Interestingly enough, another dash is present in Maupassant’s original French story, not in its English translation, where the rower says: “…j'écoutai. - Un chien hurlait, très loin” (de Maupassant “Sur L’Eau” 54) as opposed to “…with shouting I listened. A dog was barking in the distance” (de Maupassant “On the River” 171). Maupassant added that dash to, again, make the reader stop and listen with the narrator for any sign of life. Furthermore, this brief pause emphasizes the significance of the dog, the only living creature who responds to the rower.

As for the denouement, “La Nuit” ends suddenly with the protagonist arriving at the Seine. Wishing to know whether it is still “flowing” or not, he descends the steps into it. Against the reader’s hopes that something or someone will rescue the narrator, he feels the coldness of the water and believes he doesn’t have the strength to go back up. He concludes that this is where he will die (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 797-98). With a perplexing ending like this one, the reader finds himself, like with Poe’s stories, in the narrative repetition mode. One goes back to the beginning of the short story and is now able to make sense of the narrator’s questioning of the time. Before he starts to narrate what happened to him, he asks: “Well, yesterday - was it yesterday … no sun has dawned” (de Maupassant “Night: A Nightmare” 795). Like the beginning of “William Wilson,” (Poe “William Wilson” 212) this line proves that the narrator is still in the same condition he was when the story began and in one way or the other he is recounting what happened to him in the last couple of hours. Before the wandering narrator reaches the Seine, he tried to touch the indicator of his watch to know the time, only to discover that his watch stopped. Immediately after, the narrator descends into the Seine. This suspension in time is symbolic of the possible death of the storyteller.

Unlike the narrator of “La Nuit”, the rower is saved by two fishermen, at dawn, who help pull his anchor up. The very last line of the story reveals the mystery that’s been keeping the anchor at the bottom, the body of a dead woman (de Maupassant “On the River” 172). This surprise ending is shocking, leaving us with “unease” and emptiness since the tale doesn’t return to the narrator (Hottell 574-75) nor does one learn of his reaction after seeing the corpse. Nevertheless, there is a hint of the rower’s possible reaction at the beginning of the story. Interestingly enough, the narrator is depicted as a person who enjoys the river so much, indicating that he was not traumatized by his fearful experience that night and he lived to tell the

tale. In his illustration of the river, he mentions drowned men lost at the bottom in mysterious cities and "…where one trembles without knowing the reason why, as when passing through a cemetery – and indeed the river is a cemetery without graves" (de Maupassant "On the River" 169), foreshadowing the dead woman's emergence. He is at peace with the river again possibly because he believes that the dead corpse was the reason for all those fearful emotions.

Yet, the significance of this dead woman is very puzzling. Readers with wild imaginations would consider her emergence a supernatural explanation of the storyteller's situation. However, since there is no indication of her existence throughout the story, readers preferring logical deductions might be inclined to a more psychological interpretation. The body might symbolize the hidden truth that was once familiar but has become strange to the narrator. The corpse is practically at the bottom of the river, so it can be – symbolically – the truth that is deeply hidden in the unconscious. Furthermore, since the reader never knows the reaction of the narrator to seeing the corpse, it is possible to say that finding it had no significant effect on the storyteller. He simply didn't recognize any significance for him thus he will always remain ignorant of this hidden truth.

Going back to the catabasis scenario, the "Sur L'Eau" narrator might unknowingly be dead. The fact that the reader is left with a big gap between the end of the story and how the narrator continues on his life peacefully insinuates his possible transcendence to the other side. In addition, the fishermen who saved him might be suggestive of Charon. Lastly, the disappearance of the first narrator at the beginning of the tale must have certain importance or else Maupassant wouldn't have mentioned him in the first place (de Maupassant "On the River" 169). This first narrator might be an emphasis on the ignorance of the second narrator of his own death: he still believes he is alive and is entertaining a friend with his story. Another

interpretation might be that the first narrator could be Maupassant himself, recounting an incident he might have actually heard, which offers the reader more credibility to the story. Yet, having a narrator that disappears after the first paragraph and then is followed by another problematizes the reliability of their accounts, leaving the reader uncertain about the amount of truth in their narrative.

Chapter III

The Labyrinth: the Uncanny Prison in Borges

Jorge Luis Borges is one of the most influential authors of the twentieth century. A translator of Kafka, he contributed with his first short story collection to the birth of magical realism in South America (Abdel Nasser 186). Furthermore, he was heavily influenced by Poe, mentioning him in many of his essays and alluding to him in several of his short stories (Esplin 548-59). Most of Borges' stories portray his fascination with eastern cultures and their folk-tales, especially ancient Greek and Arabic traditions (Abdel Nasser 186). His work cannot be classified as terrifying or disturbing like Poe or Maupassant's fiction. However, Borges definitely offers fantastic tales that challenge the reader's imagination and tackle themes like infinity and death with new perspectives. In this chapter, I will discuss two of Borges' short stories – "La Casa de Asterión" and "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" – that were inspired by Ancient Greek and Arabic cultures. Both short stories investigate uncanny traces and their sublime effect differently from the previous four short stories. I will further examine their surprise endings and their possible effects on the reader's reception.

In the afterword of the 1960 edition of *El Aleph*, Borges writes:

> A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that that patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face. (Borges "Afterword" 183)

This quotation raises many of the questions tackled in the two short stories I picked, like the significance of the labyrinth and its different representations throughout the centuries. During the Middle Ages, it was a symbol of hell while later in the eighteenth century, it symbolized the infinite universe, with the center as its hidden meaning (Tilney 52). In modern times, many readers consider the labyrinth as representing the solitude of man, lost in a world without purpose. Borges himself mentions how for him a labyrinth is "a symbol of being lost in life" (Alifano 23). However, a labyrinth is not necessarily a spatial construct, but it can also represent time. Unrealistic repetition and duplication in space and/or time creates infinite possibilities that send the reader to different sublime realms. They also lead to the maze effect of loss and confusion, which is another definition of the uncanny (Shiloh 101).

"And the queen gave birth to a son named Asterion." (Borges "The House of Asterion" 51). This is the epigraph that starts the story of "La Casa de Asterión" (The House of Asterion), the re-telling of the Minotaur myth, yet from the monster's perspective. It was *The Minotaur*, a painting by George Frederick Watts that inspired Borges to write "La Casa de Asterión." The creature is drawn looking from a balcony to the sea, waiting for something while holding a bird in his hands (Tilney 52). Watts drew the Minotaur in very anthropomorphic light, which might have moved Borges to write about this creature from a very human point of view. To readers unfamiliar with this famous legend, this short story would be very difficult to comprehend. Yet, even for those who know the tale, most would struggle to find the well-hidden clues referring to it. It is only in the last sentence, when Theseus appears and mentions how the Minotaur "scarcely defended himself" (Borges "The House of Asterion" 53), that all the hints come together to reveal the truth: Asterion is the Minotaur.

In “La Casa de Asterión,” Borges gives the reader access to Asterion’s interior monologue, where he is suffering from the infinity curse in space, but more in time. The title draws our attention to the “house” – the labyrinth – because it is the main clue to the myth and all the mystery lies in its description. This maze, filled with “calm and solitude” and unlike the allures of a palace (Borges “The House of Asterion” 51) has its own unique fascinating features: infinite doors, no furniture, and replicated galleries. Getting in and out of this labyrinth was not a problem, confirming that Asterion is not a prisoner; however, he was horrified by people’s appearances: “…if I returned before nightfall, I did so because of the terrible dread inspired in me by the faces of the people…” (Borges “The House of Asterion” 51). Furthermore, in his contemplation outside the house, he concludes that everything around him has replicas, except “the intricate sun, and below Asterion” (Borges “The House of Asterion” 53), which discouraged him further to leave the house. Equally in “La Nuit,” Asterion is tormented by loneliness because he cannot find someone to talk to or interact with. Yet, at this point, the reader concludes that this labyrinth is not what is limiting Asterion’s freedom.

Asterion is mainly trapped in time for two main reasons: First, he is not aware of how long he’s been in this house as he doesn’t sleep much: “I can pretend anytime I like that I am asleep, and lie with my eyes closed and my breathing heavy. (Sometimes I actually fall asleep; sometimes by the time I open my eyes, the color of the day has changed.)” (Borges “The House of Asterion” 52). Also, he knows that every nine years, he is visited by nine men but “I do not know how many there have been” (Borges “The House of Asterion” 53). Second, Asterion demonstrates knowledge of his noble lineage and what his role is supposed to be. He knows his mother is a queen, thus he is too privileged to mingle with commoners or to learn how to read (Borges “The House of Asterion” 52). However, he is never able to understand the purpose of his

existence, saying that he is unique; he cannot comprehend why he is alone in this house and is visited by those men every nine years. This intensifies his confusion whether he is created into this world or he is the creator: “Perhaps I have created the stars and the sun and this huge house and no longer remember it” (Borges “The House of Asterion” 53). Yet, knowing that his “redeemer” is coming fills him with hope, since this person will put an end to his miserable solitude and provide him with all the answers. Still, he has to wait for him to come, since he doesn’t know how to find him (Borges “The House of Asterion” 53).

Getting killed by the redeemer, Theseus, the narrator never managed to find answers to his ontological question thus he has remained endlessly trapped in this labyrinthine space and time. Although it is not mentioned in the story, the reader can imagine Asterion running up to Theseus as if he is a long expected friend only to find himself getting killed. Thus, it is safe to say that when Asterion thought he found the center of the entrapping maze, it led to his death. So, “all these pointless symmetries and maniacal repetitions eventually lead to the center … that offers neither rest nor salvation, but death” (Shiloh 102).

Another interesting interpretation of the labyrinth is its possible representation of the unconscious. The unconscious, by definition, is an obscure place that no one has ever fully comprehended. Nevertheless, it is where the ultimate truth about each individual exists. The unconscious can become dangerous when the truth is trying to return to the conscious level after being repressed. The same scenario can be imagined in “La Casa de Asterión” where the narrator has been lost in his unconscious, entrapping him in uncanny repetitions to hide the ugly truth. Most secondary sources suggest that Asterion is a symbol of man, who believes he has no useful purpose in this life and thus no reason to exist. This realization paves the way to “resignation and

a willingness to accept death, possibly because the alternative, once perceived, is too horrible to accept" (Tilney 52).

What is very interesting about this short story is how Borges offers the reader a door into the thoughts of a terrifying monster. It is a realm considered too great for one's imagination and reason to concede, i.e. the sublime. By putting the reader in the mind of Asterion, one realizes that he is not a monster after all; instead he's extremely lonely and is seeking any companion. Furthermore, Asterion says "I know that my redeemer lives and will finally rise above the dust" (Borges "The House of Asterion" 53), a reference to the verse from Job 19:25 that says "I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand on the earth." This intertextuality compares Asterion's distress to Job's, giving him a more spiritual aura than just being a beast (Bell-Villada 144). It also suggests that Asterion has been suffering for a very long time, encouraging the reader to wonder whether the narrator will ever be relieved from his pain like Job or not. In addition, Borges allowed the minotaur to become the central character, not just an incident in Theseus' journey.

The second story "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" (Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in his Labyrinth) offers the reader a title like a headline in a newspaper, a fact. Now, the reader starts the story, knowing that this Ibn-Hakam will eventually be murdered; however, how and why are the real questions. The two friends, Dunraven and Unwin, are our lenses to the tale. While Dunraven recounts the mystery of Ibn-Hakam al Bokhari's death, they enter into the labyrinth that Ibn-Hakam built. Although it is dark and cold, the two men venture across the labyrinth, spending the night because of the rain. For most people, being present in a place where gruesome murders occurred is very disquieting. Dunraven bewilders the reader when he says "the murderer was already dead by the time the murder took place" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-

Bokhari" 96), inducing a mysterious air to the tale. Moreover, "time in the dark seemed slower, longer; both men feared they had lost their way and were very tired…" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 101), where their feelings of suspense, and the reader's, are intensified.

Dunraven continues on how Ibn-Hakam killed his coward cousin Saïd and fled to England where he built a labyrinth. He introduces himself to the rector Allaby as a terrible sinner, disturbing Allaby and the reader by the monstrosities he committed (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 97-98). Yet, the ghost of Saïd haunts Ibn-Hakam, chasing him everywhere, as Poe's Wilson tormented William. Three years later, he returns to the rector, horrified by Saïd's ghost, who is coming to kill him. After that, he was found dead in his labyrinth with his face crushed and the murderer was never located (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 100). As in "La Casa de Asterión," the infinity effect exists here as well with the character of Saïd. In Dunraven's version, Saïd is a hovering threat, even after his death, to Ibn-Hakam. Conversely, in Unwin's version, narrated later, he is still alive and has managed to murder Ibn-Hakam and flee with the treasure.

Unwin is very dissatisfied with Dunraven's supernatural and flawed tale. He mentions Poe's "The Purloined Letter" and how mysteries should be simple rather than the complicated version Dunraven recounted (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 96). He tells his friend "I know it's a bloody lie" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 100). A mystery should have obvious facts, only if one observes them, and they will lead to a logical explanation. Following the facts, Unwin explains that a powerful man as Ibn-Hakam shouldn't be afraid of a coward like Saïd. The latter also wouldn't have the courage to sleep so soundly nor kill Ibn-Hakam (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 98). Furthermore, hiding in a very original building like this crimson labyrinth is pointless because he can be very easily found. That is why Unwin believes it was

Saïd who escaped with half of Ibn-Hakam's treasure and built this labyrinth to lure Ibn-Hakam to his death. When Ibn-Hakam finally came, Saïd smashed his face so that no one would recognize his identity and took the rest of the treasure (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 101-103).

Similar to the previous narrators in Poe and Maupassant's short stories, these storytellers can also be termed "unreliable." Asterion, like the others, presents the tale through his perspective only. In his description of the house and what surrounds it, Asterion numbers most elements as simultaneously fourteen and infinite (Borges "The House of Asterion" 51- 53), leading the reader to question the exact number of the doors or the seas and the significance of the number fourteen in particular. A possible interpretation is that Asterion is not really aware of the size of his house nor is familiar with all of its contents. Thus, the reader cannot depend on the validity of Asterion's portrayal of the house, nor of the events happening inside it.

The tale of "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" starts with a third person omniscient narrator, introducing Dunraven and Unwin. This narrator mentions how "Both men – is there really any need to say this? – were young, absentminded, and passionate" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 95). In this example, the narrator adds this question between the dashes to further emphasize the immaturity of both Dunraven and Unwin, as if he or she is asking the readers not to trust their versions of the story. Furthermore, the omniscient narrator highlights Unwin's reactions to Dunraven's excited narration. Unwin is clearly not convinced by his friend's tale from the beginning, such as in "Meekly, Unwin asked why" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 95) and "…killed? he asked, to feign interest" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 100). After that, Dunraven becomes the foreground narrator, recounting – through his faint childhood memories and the account of Mr. Allaby – how Ibn-Hakam came to England. Mr.

Allaby has actually encountered Ibn-Hakam and listened to his life story; however, Allaby was never able to comprehend the real truth about Ibn-Hakam's origin or his state of mind (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 98-99).

To further problematize the narrative, the story jumps from Dunraven's narration to Mr. Allaby's to Ibn-Hakam's and back, without any specific order. At some point, the reader loses track of which character is talking and questions the reliability of those different versions of the same tale. After Dunraven says: "…and not a single coin remained," the third person narrator returns suddenly to give the floor to Unwin's interpretation of the events (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 100). The latter refuses to believe in the supernatural suggestion Dunraven offered and thinks of a more plausible and realistic solution to the mystery (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 102). Although his account is more convincing, it is still without any proof or witnesses. Furthermore, he is also basing his interpretation on "facts [that] might be true" since it is only through Dunraven that he knows the story (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 101).

"La Casa de Asterión" ends abruptly. In imagining the redeemer's appearance, Asterion demonstrates for the first time to the reader that he is not human, that he has a bull's head and the body of a man. Then, the last lines of the story show a sudden shift in narration from the first person to the third person, introducing the character of Theseus, the final clue that Asterion is the Cretan myth's Minotaur (Borges "The House of Asterion" 53). Suddenly, the reader realizes that Asterion's dream has come true: his redeemer came and "redeemed" him, by granting him the chance to leave this trap and transcend it. In linking the story to this famous legend, Borges possibly puts an end to the numerous interpretations of what Asterion might represent.

On the other hand, the author has actually added a whole new level of meaning to the Minotaur legend. One new interpretation is that Borges wants to humanize the Minotaur, highlighting how really he is half-bull but also half-man. He uses the Minotaur's unpopular birth name "Asterion" from Apollodorus' Library, to keep his identity a mystery and to further humanize him, rather than just be the bull of Minos (Apollod. 3.1.4, 3.15.8). Thus, the author illustrates that we as human beings have a "beastly" part inside that shares in the formation of our complex human nature (Shiloh 99-100). Furthermore, this short story has allowed the reader to pleasurably delve into questions about the ontological truth of man, realizing its infinite magnitude without any definite answers. In this respect, the reader dwells on how society marginalizes people who are different from the norm. They dehumanize them and cast them as unworthy to live.

"Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" also has a sharp shift in events when Unwin presents his interpretation of Ibn-Hakam's death. Although we, readers, noticed some contradictions in Ibn-Hakam's character and behavior, still, we didn't really expect Unwin's suggested ending. However, we are more inclined to believe it since it is more plausible, having more "artistic truth," even though it has no proof (Lindstrom 60). Dunraven is then disappointed, mentioning how: "the solution of a mystery was always a good deal less interesting than the mystery itself; the mystery had a touch of the supernatural and even the divine about it, while the solution was a sleight of hand" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 102). Many readers would agree with Dunraven, that the mystery's vagueness and incomprehensibility generates magnitude and awe while its solution tumbles the greatness into disappointing and mundane logic. It disillusions the reader from the magnificent sublime he or she was experiencing with a realistic

ending. Other readers would side with Unwin. From the start, they would be trying to find a logical explanation to the mysterious events and the surprise ending brings them this satisfaction.

Similar to Poe and Maupassant's tales, these two short stories have also entrapped the reader in the repetition mode. After the jolting denouements, we still need to go back to the beginning of the tales to find more meaning. "La Casa de Asterión" offers somewhat rewarding answers to the questions we had throughout the tale, such as the identity of Asterion and the nature of his house. Nevertheless, "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" further frustrates the reader with an inconclusive ending and even less rewarding search for meaning, after the re-reading. Returning to the beginning of this tale, the reader realizes that the epigraph makes more sense now in relation to the events.

These Borgesian short stories seem to be challenging the previous ones of Poe and Maupassant. Borges centralizes an actual labyrinth in his stories where in the four others the labyrinth existed metaphorically. In Poe's short stories, the characters were in a labyrinth-like state as they were both trapped in their sick unconscious and were never able to break free. Maupassant's characters were enclosed in labyrinthine settings like the night and the river. Yet, in Borges' stories the physical labyrinth existed in both of them but it didn't imprison the characters nor pose any threat to their lives. The epigraph in "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" explains it best.

It is part of verse number forty-one, from the twenty-ninth chapter of the Qur'an: "... is the likeness of the spider who buildeth her a house" (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 95). Borges might have chosen this particular verse as the epigraph for many reasons: One, the spider's web looks very much like a maze, trapping many insects as prey for the spider, just as Ibn-Hakam was lured by Saïd into the labyrinth, then killed (Abdel Nasser 195). Nevertheless, as

the Quranic verse continues, the spider's web is the weakest of all houses (*The Qur'an*, 29.41), so is the labyrinth in both stories. The labyrinth in "La Casa de Asterión" never physically imprisoned Asterion. Unwin and Dunraven also managed to get out of Ibn-Hakam's labyrinth with relative ease, problematizing the whole concept of loss and despair in a maze. While trying to make sense of Dunraven's tale, Unwin alludes to the Minotaur myth, highlighting how the creature in the maze is the dangerous one, not the labyrinth itself (Borges "Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari" 102). This idea confirms that the physical labyrinth can be seen only as an accomplice to the real menace, in this case Saïd. Therefore, Borges has managed to diminish the concept of the labyrinth and its conventional menacing awe.

Conclusion

In this research, I have attempted to trace uncanny elements and their sublime evidences present in these tales. After that, I have discussed the reading process and how the audience can be affected by the way the stories are presented. I have chosen to study stories from the fantastic genre because this type of fiction entices many readers for several reasons. First of all, it allows them to consciously live a different kind of reality and to experience a paranormal situation. Also, this genre might help readers get cleansed from negative energies, achieving Aristotelian catharsis. Another possible reason is how these stories might simply be triggering some kind of connection to the reader's unconscious since they tackle issues related to psychoanalysis in a story form. The reader might relate to the psychological dilemma the character is suffering from because he or she might have unconsciously experienced the same feelings. In my reading of these texts, I additionally examined the surprise ending and its narratological significance in the total effect of the story on the reader.

In this comparative study, I observed how Poe, Maupassant, and Borges tackled the uncanny and the sublime in slightly different ways. In Poe's short stories, the dominant theme is the double and its terrifying projections. The protagonists of each short story were haunted and tormented by their doubles, forcing them to behave frantically. The Maupassant short stories mainly revolve around the theme of loneliness, with its horrendous consequences. The two tales portray the narrators' attempts to escape their terrifying situations on their own. As for the Borgesian tales, they mainly highlight the theme of the labyrinth which can be another representation of the unconscious. In addition, these six short stories can be considered as a series in the development of the fantastic genre. Poe focused on the narrator and his psyche, without much emphasis on the protagonist's surroundings. Yet, Maupassant – who might have

read Poe's works through Baudelaire's translation – has heavily discussed the unconscious' different representations in the natural environment around the narrators. On the other hand, Borges was strongly influenced by Poe, but added a more extreme approach to his fantastical stories. They seem to be disrupting this genre's traditional style – originated by Poe – and adding more confusion and complexity in the sequence of the plot.

While reading these tales, I realized that aesthetic distance is the main reason why I was able to enjoy these protagonists' horrifying stories. Consciously knowing that these events are fictitious, I allow myself to be transported into these tales' fascinating worlds. However, the narrators have greatly contributed to the incomprehensibility of these accounts and their endings. We find these storytellers to be untrustworthy for one main reason – they recount the narrative through their perspective only. The audience will always doubt how much truth is in the protagonist's scenario. Even though "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" has a third person omniscient narrator, the narrative is complicated by the other first person narrators, interchangeably recounting the story. The problem is not only in the narration but also in the actions of the characters. Many of the storytellers have behaved strangely, arousing many questions on their level of sanity and consciousness of their surroundings.

Regarding the surprise ending, I was able to deduce several points through my study of these particular short stories. First of all, the surprise ending's main role, as its name suggests, is to shock the reader from the story's world into another more realistic one. If this sudden denouement is conclusive, it can demystify the fantastical and horrifying realms the authors have painted. Therefore, it ties the reader back to earth as it solves these stories' mysterious plots. At the same time, it also allows some readers to be cathartically satisfied. Conversely, a slightly-

open denouement can still shock the reader, allowing the horrifying effect to linger until the very end.

Looking back at most *peripeteia* and *anagnorsis* in ancient Greek tragedies, the reader finds many differences comparing them with their modern version. The first example is that most audiences in antiquity already knew the story, so they were not really surprised by the *peripeteia*. With that said, the *anagnorsis* was always laid out slowly after the sudden twist, allowing the characters to express their thoughts and feelings about what just happened. Moreover, the audience is also given time to witness the character's realization of this ugly truth and to empathize with each person's consequent behavior. In contrast, with these short stories, most readers are shocked by the twist in the plot because they did not have any previous knowledge of it. After that, the story ends, leaving no room for the narrator to express his or her opinion. One is only left to deduce what might have happened to the storyteller after this sudden event. Furthermore, we as readers are deprived of the time to make sense of this revelation and draw connections between it and the rest of the plot.

Most of the short stories tackled here have inconclusive surprise endings. I believe their main role is to shake the reader from any stable information he or she took for granted. It denies the reader any wish for an ultimate truth, prompting one to come up with several interpretations, and entrapping the reader in a repetition compulsion. There are several possible explanations for why the stories were constructed as such. As mentioned earlier, the fantastic, as a genre, discusses the present, where the past and the future seem to be unimportant. It wants the readers to remain in the current situation, without really bothering about what might have occurred or what could take place. Secondly, the authors might be suggesting that the narrator's past and future have no significance in the intended effect of the incidents on the readers. Another

interpretation for this repetitive technique is that it reflects the nature of the unconscious. No one has ever fully managed to comprehend this part in our psyche, no matter how many times we try. There is also an act of reiteration in the uncanny, where the repressed ideas are trying to return and re-occur all over again.

Finally, the surprise ending is definitely an integral part in the legacy of the fantastic genre. It forces the reader out of his or her comfort zone by providing tenuous answers that provoke further mysteries. In our attempt to find the truth, we get stuck in repetitive reading as we are compelled to return to the beginning of the story and search for clues that would open new windows of meaning. Through our second reading, we are able to link few facts together; however, they do not really help in cracking the mystery. In nearly all of the short stories I examined, there is always a remainder at the end – a missing piece of the puzzle that is never found. No matter how many different scenarios we can think of, we are nowhere close in fully knowing what really happened. As readers, we will always be cursed with our infinite search for meaning.

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